

## LOCAL NEWS

# Chief book sorter looking for new challenges



Nellie Doneva/Reporter-News Margaret Basquette sorts books for the annual book sale at the Abilene Public Library Tuesday, June 7, 2016.

*By Loretta Fulton, Special to the Reporter-News*

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A past president of the Friends of the Abilene Public Library doesn't mince words when talking about Margaret Basquette.

"There wouldn't be a book sale without her," said Carrie Casada, who served a one-year term as president of the Friends and has worked with Basquette for six years. "I truly admire her so much — everybody does."

Other members of the Friends are stepping in to make sure that the annual book sale goes on, despite the loss of Basquette, who at 81 has

decided it's time to step aside. This year's sale will be held Thursday through Sunday at the Civic Center.

Basquette will continue as a member of the Friends but no longer will spend long hours year-round sorting donations for the book sale. She does her work in a storage area at the back of the basement in the main library, with the help of a few other volunteers.

Matt Preston, current president of the Friends and chair of the book sale, has known Basquette 10 years and has worked with her the past five years. He described Basquette as a "quiet leader" who gets things done.

"The only demand she ever makes," Preston said in an email, "is for empty boxes to be moved from storage to the library basement."

There, Basquette diligently goes through the donations of used books, CDs, vinyl records, even audiobooks on eight-track and cassette tapes. She culls what most likely won't sell, donating some of it to Goodwill Industries and tossing the rest.

Basquette credits the late Ricki Brown, former librarian, with coming up with the sorting system she now uses. Boxes are numbered according types of donations and a corresponding number is taped to a bookshelf. Previously, donations were sorted only by "fiction" or "nonfiction."

"The book sale in those days was very, very small," Basquette said.

But it has grown considerably. Casada said that today more than 100,000 items are available at the book sale. What's amazing is that Basquette probably could tell what many of them are.

"She has touched just about every one of those," Casada said.

Thanks to the large number of donations and popularity of the book sale, the Friends organization has raised enough money to donate

more than \$500,000 toward a new branch library in the Mall of Abilene. Preston gives much of the credit to Basquette.

"Margaret is the backbone of the book sale," he said in an email. "She is loyal, hard working and bears much fruit."

Basquette isn't sure where her next volunteer efforts will be, but it's likely she won't stay still for long. She will continue volunteering with the Friends, but also will look for other places of service.

"I don't know what it is at the moment," she said.

Born in Crockett, Basquette graduated from Reagan High School in Houston and from Sam Houston State University. She taught fourth and fifth grades in Houston, Waco, and Abilene, where she moved in 1965.

Basquette and her husband, Hugh, have two sons Ronn and Roger, one daughter Vickie and three grandchildren. When Basquette quit teaching school, she began volunteering. Besides the library, she has volunteered at Abilene Regional Medical Center, the Grace Museum, Frontier Texas, and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

She started volunteering at the library in 1991 when barcodes first were being used on books. Her job was to put plastic covers on the books after the barcode was stamped on. She did that until she started her sorting duties in 1997.

Basquette traces her love of books and reading to childhood when her mother read to her and her four siblings. She still is an avid reader, especially all types of fiction — "Preferably something that has a happy ending," she said.

Now that it has come time to hand the sorting job over to others, Basquette is leaving with a mixture of sadness and relief.

"I've thoroughly loved being involved in this," she said.

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